September 20, 2002: Lake Michigan Coastal Program Approval Ceremony
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Northwest Indiana has led the journey to find a balance between today's resource needs and the responsibility to protect resources for future generations. Through this journey, we learned that partnerships best accomplish the necessary steps to fulfill our stewardship responsibilities. Today, we celebrate the next step in our journey as stewards of Indiana's natural and cultural resources. The approval of the Lake Michigan Coastal Program is a step forward, taken in partnership with the many other stewards working to achieve balance in resource development, protection, and restoration.

As Doug shared with us today, the Coastal Zone Management Act created a national partnership that has proven its success in bringing together federal, state, and local partners. This partnership was tailored for Indiana through the development of the Lake Michigan Coastal Program. Developing the program included many steps taken in concert with people already working to improve their coastal communities. Great progress was made in identifying common concerns and goals. It included literally hundreds of people helping to create a plan to implement the Indiana Lake Michigan Coastal Program. It was this part of the journey that best set the groundwork for a unified partnership and the success we celebrate today. Together, we have set important goals for the Lake Michigan Coastal Program:

- Protecting and restoring significant natural and cultural resources

- Preventing the loss of life and property in coastal hazard areas

- Improving public access for recreation

- Preventing coastal polluted runoff

- Revitalizing urban waterfronts and ports and

- Improving government coordination

These goals define Indiana's commitment to enhance Lake Michigan and its watershed for present and future generations. The Lake Michigan Coastal Program will provide a framework for developing partnerships to achieve these goals.

Today marks the continuation of our stewardship journey. As in the past, Northwest Indiana has not hesitated to tackle some of the toughest challenges facing our coastal communities such as pollution, habitat loss, and demand for public access. The challenge to remediate and prevent pollution from harming Lake Michigan and our rivers once seemed too large a task. But through partnerships, steps to return ecological integrity to these resources have begun. It is now possible to speak about restoration where once the possibility did not exist, as well as to reclaim our natural heritage such as the Great Marsh, dune and swale, prairies, and a diversity of fish and wildlife. Several public and private partnerships and other initiatives increased and improved public access where it was once not available: along parts of the shoreline, at parks, and at historic sites.

Not only will our journey include finding innovative ways to overcome significant challenges, but we must also celebrate the unique treasures of our coastal communities. The joy of watching a green-backed heron hunt for fish along the edge of an interdunal pond should be shared by everyone, especially the children that make this region their home. Through partnerships with organizations such as educational institutions and learning centers, we can

provide opportunities to connect people with the coastal environment and history. Through this connection, a pride and determination to protect and restore our coastal environment will be nurtured. Governor O'Bannon's proclamation of Lake Michigan Coast Week is one step in the journey to celebrate our coastal resources. This year many organizations contributed to make Coast Week a success. And each year will bring new opportunities to highlight what is good about our region during Lake Michigan Coast Week.

Today, while we celebrate the distance traveled and the many successes during this journey, we can also look ahead to what will be achieved through a growing partnership and the Lake Michigan Coastal Program.